Ficker Says Republicans 'Failed Me' As He Switches Affiliation to Independent

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After 30 years as a Republican, Montgomery County executive candidate **Robin Ficker** has decided to leave the party and run as an independent.

In an e-mail to a reporter last week, Ficker said he had recently changed his party registration because he was disappointed with the Republican Party. He said the party has failed to keep energy taxes from skyrocketing, to solve the county's traffic problem and to control spending.

"I don't think the Republican Party is interested in controlling waste, duplication or spending anymore," he said in an interview. "I think that's evident on the national level, I think it's evident on the state level and I think it's evident in Montgomery County, too. And you know, I think we deserve better.

Ficker also criticized Montgomery County Republican chairman **Tom Reinheimer** for saying in a recent Washington Post article that finding county executive candidates "of the caliber you want" has been difficult because registered Democrats outnumber Republicans.

"My response is that the Republican Party has failed me and the voters of Montgomery County. I never failed my former party," Ficker wrote in his e-mail.

Ficker, a 62-year-old Boyds resident and lawyer, has lost bids for several offices, including state Senate and Montgomery school board. He served one term as a state delegate in the late 1970s. His decision to drop out of the party leaves just one Republican candidate — Kensington resident **Charles R. Floyd**, a self-employed border security consultant.

Reinheimer said in an interview that Ficker had not been very involved in the party but had expected its leaders to give him their full support before September's primary. Reinheimer said the party does not endorse a candidate before the primary.

"His frustration is he got into the race, he expected the party just to embrace him and pretty much coronate him . . . What he doesn't understand is that's why we have a primary election, and that it's up to any candidate to go out and make the case to Republican voters," he said.

Reinheimer also said that Ficker is too combative when he should be reaching out to voters.

"Robin is more of a one-person show," Reinheimer said. "He's not so much wrong on some of the issues or some of his ideas, but his personality

See NOTEBOOK, *Page 14*

Ahmad Enters Council At-Large Contest

NOTEBOOK, *From Page 2*

gets him in so much trouble."

In response to Reinheimer's description of him as combative, Ficker said, "I suppose that is like a derogatory term that he uses to describe anyone who challenges the status quo."

In order to run as an independent, Ficker will have to collect signatures from 1 percent of registered voters eligible to vote for county executive.

Gordon to Give Up Seat

State Del. **Michael R. Gordon**, one of the longest serving members of Montgomery County's delegation to the General Assembly, announced this week that he won't seek reelection this year, which could set off a scramble in District 17 to replace him.

"Twenty-four years is enough," said Gordon, a Democrat who was first elected in 1982. "It was one of the hardest decisions I had to make. It was a good ride."

Even before Gordon announced his retirement, several Democrats were preparing to challenge him this year. The district includes Rockville and Gaithersburg.

Ryan Spiegel, a lawyer who has already raised $30,000, plans to announce his candidacy for one of the three District 17 delegate seats on April 17.

Cory Syanski, 31, president of the Saybrooke Homeowners Association, is also running. Syanski had about $5,000 in his campaign account as of January, according to the State Board of Elections.

Jim Gilchrist, the son of former County Executive **Charles W. Gilchrist**, is also considering the race, Democratic activists say.

In the 2002 Democratic primary, Gilchrist, who works for the county Department of Health and Human Services, came within 1,000 votes of winning a nomination for one of the three seats.

Ahmad Makes Council Bid

Tufail Ahmad, a Montgomery County businessman and community leader, will announce on Tuesday that he is running for an at-large seat on the Montgomery County Council, according to a statement put out by his campaign.

Ahmad, a Pakistani American and Democrat, is the latest in a string of minorities hoping to be elected to the council this year.

The council currently has just one non-white member, **Tom Perez** (D-Silver Spring), the son of Dominican immigrants.

But Perez may run for state attorney general instead of seeking reelection to the council.

Ahmad, of Potomac, has said in the past that he hopes his entry into the race will encourage more Muslims — a growing segment of the county population — to vote.

There are also four African American Democrats running for at-large council seats — **Robert "Bo" Newsome**, an educator and community activist, **Reginald M. Felton**, a former county school board president, **Hugh Bailey**, a county government program manager, and **Donnell Peterman**, a minister.

Health Ed Program Updated

The county school system's health education curriculum that is currently being rewritten could be ready to be piloted in a handful of middle and high school classrooms by spring 2007.

In a recent memo to the Board of Education updating them on the progress of efforts to rewrite the controversial curriculum, Superintendent **Jerry D. Weast** said that he expects formal recommendations on revisions to the eighth- and 10th-grade curriculums to be submitted to the board in June.

Included in the materials will be a new video on condom use to be shown to high school sophomores, as well as two 45-minute lessons on "sexual variations" at the eighth- and 10th-grade levels. As some folks might recall, lessons about homosexuality drew concern from some parents who felt the topic was inappropriate for eighth-graders.

Weast noted that the school system consulted with a panel of experts recommended by the Maryland chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics on the revisions.

A 15-member Citizens Advisory Committee — including representatives from two groups, Citizens for a Responsible Curriculum and Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays, which sued MCPS last May to block implementation of the original revisions — will also offer feedback on the materials.

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